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U.S. to Send Pilots to Aid Mexican Fight on Drugs

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WASHINGTON, July 17—Six United States airplanes with civilian pilots under contract to the State Department will participate this fall in a 45-day Mexican effort to eradicate opium fields, Administration and Congressional officials said today.

Use of United States citizens to pilot aircraft involved in drug eradication efforts in Mexico is unusual.

The plan is part of a renewed effort to combat the growing use of Mexico as a place for cultivation and collection of illegal drugs destined for the United States, Reagan Administration officials told the House Task Force on International Narcotic Control. The six Thrush planes, considered the best aircraft for crop-dusting, will double the capacity of Mexican forces to spray opium crops with herbicides. The Thrush is about 30 feet overall, with a wingspan of 44 feet.

The pilots will be hired by the State Department under a program of helping other countries' antidrug campaigns. Two United States pilots are already on assignment to Mexico training pilots, officials said.

The disclosure of the Mexican effort came as United States military personnel began working with Bolivian authorities in what officials described as an assault on drug manufacturing facilities there.

Ann B. Wroblewski, acting assistant Secretary of State for international narcotics matters, told members of the House panel that an agreement had been reached June 18 with Mexican legal officials for "an intensive spraying campaign" against opium poppy in Sinaloa, Durango and Chihuahua, three states she described as the "heartland" of the heroin industry in Mexico.

The American aircraft would join a force that includes three Mexican spraying helicopters.

"The objective is to see just how much of the fall opium poppy crop can be destroyed through a high-intensity campaign," she said.

Leading Source, They Say

According to the United States Customs Service, Mexico is the leading source of heroin and marijuana entering the United States. The service also said more than 30 percent of the cocaine smuggled into the United States came through Mexico.

Although Ms. Wroblewski did not say in her testimony that United States pilots would be used, other officials of the agency and the House panel said this was so. A State Department official said that the bureau contracted on a regular basis with private pilots to fly missions such as this.

The announcement of the new campaign was made at a hearing in which the Reagan Administration was criticized by task force chairman Repre-

sentative Larry Smith, Democrat of Florida, and several Republican members of the panel over the declining effectiveness of anti-drug efforts in Mexico and the handling of an investigation into the killing of an officer of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration.

Regarding the 10-year eradication and interdiction efforts in Mexico, officials of the State Department, the Drug Enforcement Administration and Customs Service generally agreed that it was a model program that had fallen apart in recent years.